

LAURIE MILLER

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Laurie Miller and I am employed by Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain, based in Great Falls. I work as a nurse case manager with the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver which is funded through the Senior and Long-Term Care Division. The purpose of the Home and Community Based Services Program is to assist elderly or physically disabled individuals to live as independently as possible in a community setting of their choice while maintaining the individual's safety, as well as physical and mental well-being. In addition to this waiver, our case management department also serves consumers on the Severe and Disabling Mental Illness (or SDMI) waiver under the AMD Division. We are one of four pilot sites for the SDMI waiver.

The Home and Community Based Services Program, or Medicaid waiver, is intended to help reduce cost of care, hopefully less than care in an institutional setting. Each agency must meet state regulations in order to be an approved provider. There is also considerable accountability to the state for the use of Medicaid funds. The expenditure of funds is closely monitored within each agency and by the state.

The case managers for both of our waiver programs work closely with individual consumers, their families, and significant others to coordinate and maintain appropriate services. Each eligible recipient is able to choose their service providers.

It is so very important to maintain the current funding levels for waiver for many reasons. The Health Care for Healthcare Workers Funding has helped reduced caregiver turnover in the home setting which provides more efficient care and use of funding. Maintaining provider rate increases will help insure our providers are able to continue to care for our existing waiver consumers. Cut backs may limit the number of waiver consumers they are able to serve.

Our department is also very proactive in working on the Nursing Home Transition Project. This program helps get appropriate individuals out of nursing homes and back into the community with services. We would not be able to do this if the individual nursing home budget did not follow the consumer as it currently does. On page B-257 of the LFD Budget Analysis, it is proposed that 100 individuals be moved out of higher costing nursing homes and into lower costing community settings. It does not specify however that the funding follows the consumer. Also proposed on this page, HCBS waiver faces an additional 2.2% budget cut to their existing budget. It is unclear how these individuals could adequately and more importantly safely be served in the community with insufficient funding.

I would like to give you a brief example of how valuable the Home and Community Based Program is and why maintaining funding at the current level is imperative.

One of our consumers (I will call him Jim) was involved in a motor vehicle accident over 15 years ago. He suffered a broken neck and is now quadriplegic. Because of the Home and Community Based Services Program, Jim was able to return home after his rehabilitation. In addition to the care from private duty nursing and paid caregivers assisting with his medical needs, Jim's home was modified so that he could safely be cared for by family and caregivers in his own home. He was able to watch his son grow up and become a fine young man. This young man still lives with him and helps care for him around his own work schedule. Jim's van was also modified to help him better access the community.

Jim loves to hunt, which he is able to do with the help of family and caregivers. He frequents the farmer's market on his own in his power wheelchair and enjoys bartering with the vendors. He grows his own garden, with the help of caregivers as they are able to help him plant and maintain the garden. He enjoys making his own salsa. He makes his own stew and pulled pork sandwiches. He has friends over to his "man cave" in his garage to watch football. He visits the family business every day as part of his social routine which he does on his own after getting situated in his wheelchair.

Many people might say these things are not necessary. Ask anyone who has the option to live out their days in a nursing home sharing a room with a stranger, or living in the home setting, watching their children grow up, and enjoying the things in life that keep the peace and harmony in our minds what their choice would be. On any given day, anyone of us could find ourselves or a loved one in an automobile accident and be in need of some of the services Jim was fortunate enough to receive through the Home and Community Based Program.

I ask for this committee to please maintain the current funding levels for this program so we can continue to do the work we do and consumers can continue to receive the quality of life they deserve. Thank you for hearing my testimony.